

## Chapter 10

### ***‘An enormous expense enclosing and dividing’.* Agricultural Improvement in eighteenth-century Bute**

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OVER 40 years ago the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) began an archaeological and architectural survey of the county of Argyll. With the publication of seven volumes between 1971 and 1992, this turned out to be a project of wide scope, one that changed the organisation, and influenced our understanding of this part of Scotland to a great degree. It has long been a source of local frustration that other parts of Scotland have not been surveyed in such detail, though the reasons for this are complex and multiple. In the case of the Isle of Bute, it was simply out-with Argyllshire (fig 10.1).

With this in mind, it was with great pleasure that RCAHMS embarked on a detailed survey of Bute between 2009 and 2011, thanks largely to the sponsorship of the Discover Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme (DBLPS), a project that held at its root the principle of active engagement with the community of the island itself, as well as the wider community of interest. Considerably more detailed than a traditional Inventory survey, the project encompassed the revision of over 500 sites, as well as aerial sorties and documentary research. Over thirty measured surveys were undertaken in the same tried and tested way, but this time hand-in-hand with enthusiasts, and a small but well illustrated publication sold out within the first year (Geddes & Hale 2010).

Bute has a long and illustrious history of archaeological study, and it currently boasts two important organisations: the Buteshire Natural History Society and Bute Museum. Both were nurtured in their infancy by John Nairn Marshall (1860–1945) and his daughter Dorothy (1900–1992), and both continue to inspire and inform current generations. The Bute Settlement Survey project also deserves a particular mention as it has added greatly to our knowledge of the island’s rural past, recording about 200 settlement sites, mainly dating from the eighteenth century (for a summary see Proudfoot & Hannah 2000). That project takes a well-deserved place as an early example of the currency of partnerships between professionals and local enthusiasts, and an exploration of the eighteenth-century rural landscape.

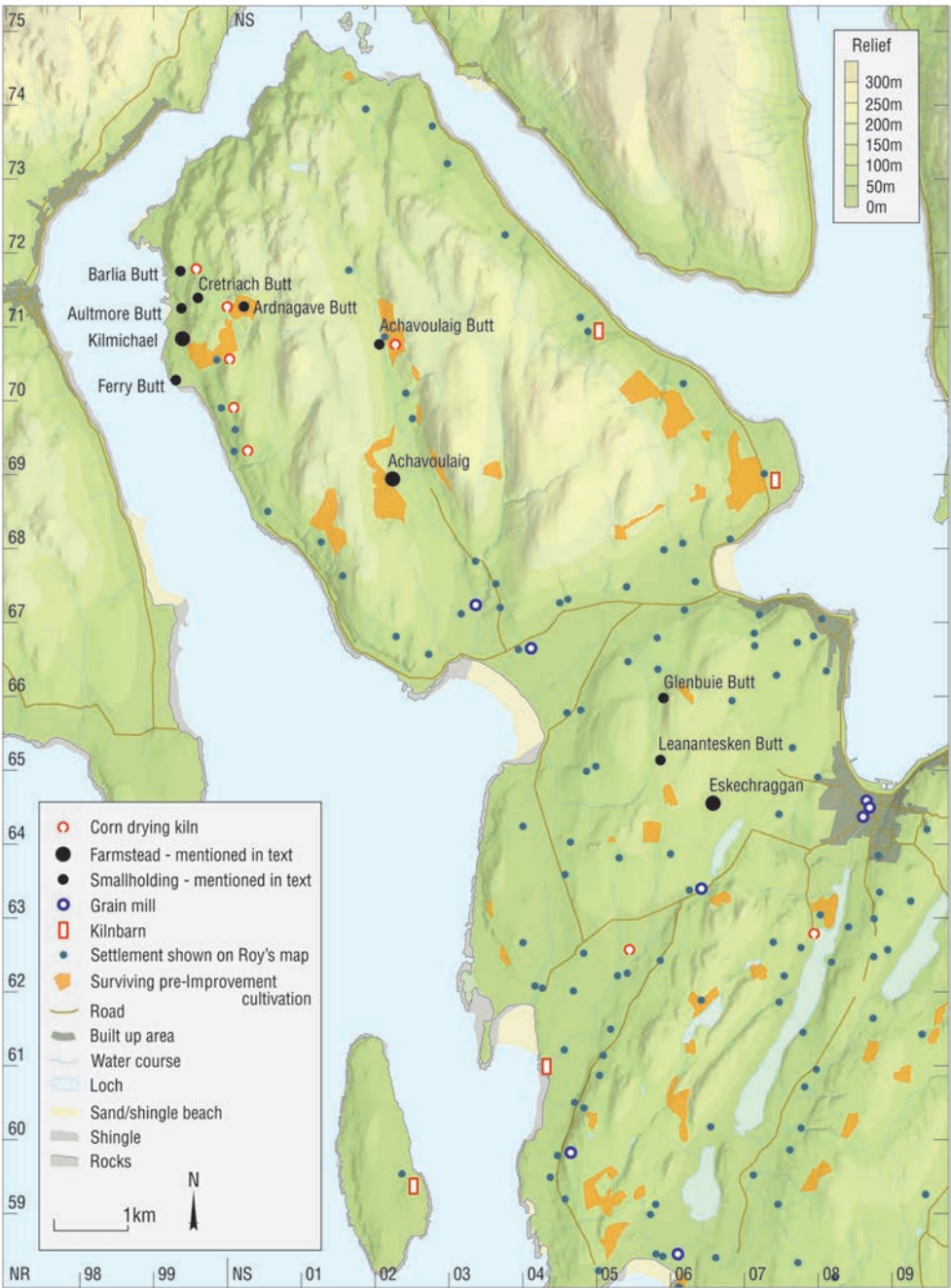


Fig 10.1 This map of south and central Bute depicts the farmsteads discussed in the text against areas where pre-Improvement cultivation remains are visible, derived from Historic Landuse Assessment data, and the settlement pattern in the mid eighteenth century, derived from Roy's Military Map (Crown Copyright RCAHMS GV004951).

It rapidly became apparent in 2009 that an all-island survey would highlight certain themes of interest and importance. The mid to late eighteenth century was naturally worthy of further study due to the surviving remains and the suite of documentary sources, including more than seventy estate maps. The central aim of this paper is to highlight these sources and to compare and contrast the archaeological and documentary evidence. After a short introduction to the theme of Improvement and summaries of the types of evidence available, there are three detailed case studies, all from the northern half of the island. A subsequent note on critical approaches draws much from a recent workshop held by the DBLPS. The examples presented here serve to illustrate the potential for further and detailed study of both the archaeological landscape and the Bute Collection at Mount Stuart Archive.

### **Documentary evidence**

The Improvement period (c1750–1850) is better known through the discipline of history rather than archaeology, the latter undergoing something of an awakening in the last twenty years. Features of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not considered ‘archaeological’ until the later decades of the twentieth century and did not appear in early RCAHMS Inventories. The application of archaeology and map studies to the 1800s began in Scotland with Horace Fairhurst in the late 1960s (1968; 1969). The Improvement period tends not to feature in summaries of Scotland’s archaeology, despite the fact that a high proportion of surviving sites and monuments are either a product of, or have been affected by, this process of change. Particularly appealing to enthusiast and professional alike, it is a period more readily understandable than much of what precedes it, and for many people it is a crucial theme in their own family histories. Only a small proportion of any archaeology syllabus tackles Improvement, and commercial archaeological projects (an important source of funding for excavations in particular) rarely include a thorough analysis of Improvement features. Recent RCAHMS publications have gone some way to exploring this theme in more detail, illustrating examples of the buildings and landscapes which are characteristic (Glendinning & Wade Martins 2008; RCAHMS 2007; RCAHMS 2008; Boyle 2009; RCAHMS 2011).

Surviving evidence for eighteenth-century rural landscapes has been affected by the essentially transforming nature of Improvement. Driven in part by the Scottish Enlightenment, there was a clear change in the attitude of landowners and their factors, a transition from acceptance of a God-given world to the development of one that could be actively moulded and exploited more explicitly. Adding further impetus, transport networks were improving, technological changes were revolutionising manufacturing, markets were opening up, and labour was readily available. There were great incentives for the creation of wealth.

In Bute, a landscape of irregular arable folds measuring no more than three acres disappeared to be replaced by larger, more regular fields enclosed by stone walls. Vernacular stone and clay buildings with thatched cruck-framed roofs were taken down and replaced by typical lime-mortared courtyard farms. Long established meadow, wood and pasture was rationalised. These features survive in some places, particularly in areas given over to sheep and in places where the high water mark of early Improvement was not economically sustainable in later periods. Coupled with this, the movement to a more efficient use of arable land tended to cause the abandonment of outfield that had previously been cultivated

periodically, and there was an overall reduction both in arable cover and in settlement dispersal.

In the eighteenth century, most of the Isle of Bute was owned by the 3rd Earl, John Stuart (1713–1792). As the first Scottish Prime Minister of Britain, Bute was a highly educated and influential figure who spent part of his upbringing with the Dukes of Argyll, prime movers in Improvement (RCAHMS 1992: 32). The ownership of estates at Wortley, in Yorkshire, and Luton Hoo, in Bedfordshire (where the house had been designed by Robert Adam, and the landscaping by Capability Brown), must have influenced both his expectations and his awareness of agricultural potential. Bute was also the first president of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1780 (Smellie 1792); interestingly, the pursuit of archaeology now extends beyond the forts and cairns that he was interested in, to the results of his own sponsorship of agricultural change (Geddes & Hale 2010: 3).

A good description of the state of agriculture in Bute during the eighteenth century comes from agricultural surveys (Smith 1798; Aiton 1816), the Statistical Account, and in particular the writing of Blain (Ross 1880). John Blain, who came to Bute in 1761 worked as a factor, town clerk, tax surveyor, custom collector, sheriff and magistrate. His papers represent an important source, complementing that of the estate. Old parish registers record the marriage of John Blain to minister's daughter Elizabeth Campbell in Rothesay in May 1768 (Rothesay Old Parish Registers). They went on to have ten children between 1769 and 1787.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the rents of the Bute farms were generally paid partly in kind, partly in labour (Ross 1880: 269). Tenancy was 'at will', so either the landlord or the tenant could terminate the contract at any time, given a reasonable amount of notice. This system may have worked well when the tenants, factors and landlords had a close relationship, but in a situation where mistrust might develop it acted to prevent improvement in both building stock and land. The landlord also retained a 'steel-bow', a vested interest in each crop: if a tenant wished to move on, half the crop he sowed would go to the new tenant and half to the owner, hardly an incentive for an efficient changeover. Incoming tenants could rely on the harvest of their forebears and begin a tenancy with very little capital, clearly a good opportunity for some, but one that would not necessarily benefit the land holder.

By about 1748, the Earl of Bute had introduced a few farmers from other parts of the country, such as Annandale (Aiton 1816: 73; Ross 1880: 269), in order to stimulate new approaches to farming on the island. During 1759, he made a number of crucial changes to increase (and demand) the independence of the tenant, sweeping aside the previous arrangements. He gave up the steel-bow, stopped accepting rents in kind or labour, and changed the dates of exit and entry to Martinmas (11 November) and the subsequent Whitsunday (15 May), meaning that the incoming tenant would have to plant a new crop before harvest the following year (Ross 1880: 270). Leases were set at nineteen years, replacing the earlier system of tenancy at will. Estate plans of 1759 demonstrate that the farms around Mount Stuart (eg Kerrytonlia, Kerrylamont, Bruchag and New Farm) had already been reorganised to a great extent. In one case, the expense of enclosure may have equated to the value of over twenty years crop (RHP14107, 18).

The survey for the southern part of Roy's Military Map of Scotland (1752–55) provides an interesting and accessible snapshot of the whole island, which can be compared with

more detailed estate sources. Initiated with some urgency after the '45, this national survey is nowadays referred to with some caution, since there are many areas where it cannot be relied upon as a true reflection of settlement. In Bute, however, it is complete, showing 178 named features, mostly small farmsteads, as well as roads, arable land and forest. About 81 of the 156 farmsteads were rebuilt in the nineteenth century and continued as farms into and beyond the Improvement period. Although ostensibly produced at a scale of 1:25,000, the surveyors gave considerably more attention to the town of Rothesay and the house and gardens at Mount Stuart than to the countryside in general. The level of detail reflects the intention of the sponsors, rather than the capability of the surveyors.

It is surely no coincidence that the next major phase of investment in Bute was about nineteen years later, during the tenure of factor Peter May (c1722–1795). By that time, much had already taken place, although there was concern at the cost and the manner of its execution. In 1777, Scottish politician James Stuart Mackenzie (c1719–1800) wrote to his brother Lord Bute that 'you were to be at no expense further than might be absolutely necessary, either for keeping up the present rents, or for an immediate return' (Adams 1979: 203). One of Scotland's most important early land managers and surveyors, May came to Bute as factor with Mackenzie's recommendation, having undertaken surveys for him from the 1750s. In fact Mackenzie was instrumental in his employment and it was Mackenzie as much as Lord Bute who drove Improvements, after experience in his estates in Perthshire, Angus and Ross and Cromarty. With his son Alexander (Sandy), Peter May quickly went about a re-survey of the estate farms, as well as the assessment and valuation of the estate building stock. In a letter dated January 1780, May explained the dynamic nature of agricultural improvements:

The south side of the island is mostly a cornfield, and has cost Lord Bute an enormous expense inclosing and dividing the lands with ditch and hedge. But I must observe with regret that they are now in wretched order.

(Adams 1979: 217)

Not long afterwards, it was clear that May has instituted a number of key changes and was well on the way to improving things for his employer:

...As to the rents of the estate, I think Peter May has arranged things so that he will be able to raise some of them even next year and more the year after. In short all seems to be going well there..."

Letter from J S Mackenzie to 3rd Earl of Bute, August 1780

(Adams 1979: 219)

The case studies in this paper make use of three documentary sources in particular; the estate maps by John Foulis completed in 1759, the estate maps produced by the May family dated between 1781 and 1784, and the 'inventory and appreciation' of farmsteads begun by Alexander May in 1782.

The maps by Foulis, produced in 1759 and bound in a volume at Mount Stuart, include over forty surveys of individual or small groups of farms, each with a description of the character of the land, advice on improvements, and mention of particular issues, such as

want of labour. Buildings were generally depicted with both the correct alignment and the correct size, although they were shown as idealised elevations, rather than in plan. A typical byre-house, for example, is depicted as a three-bay cottage with a central door, two windows and chimney stacks, but this bears little resemblance to the buildings described in later documents or archaeological remains. The occasional representation of a second storey is probably accurate, at Meikle Kilmory for example, and the symbol of a wheel by the gable indicates the presence of a grain mill. The depiction of arable is idealised, with straight rigs shown in patchworks filling the boundaries of farms, but meadow, pasture and woodland was also shown, with small hillocks indicating the presence of rough terrain. His plan of the farms and policies at Mount Stuart is considerably more detailed and the plan of the house and garden is a fine example of eighteenth-century survey (see Geddes & Hale 2010: 42), for the level of survey detail tends to reflect the level of improvement. Unfortunately, little is known about Foulis and, while it is likely that correspondence survives at Mount Stuart, there is only one other plan by him in the National Archives of Scotland.

Correspondence from throughout Peter May's career describes the theodolite, poles and chains that were used and something of the methodology tried and tested in different parts of Scotland (Adams 1979). Up to four boys were employed to assist, and local guides helped the surveyors with field names. Large scale general plans were produced to aid the locating of marches, while smaller scale maps depicted individual or small groups of farms. May wrote with clear instructions about the process of reducing plans, a task which had clearly vexed his apprentice in the 1760s. Presumably overseen by his father, Alexander's plans of Bute are extremely detailed, showing individual rigs, dykes, buildings and archaeological features, with names and comments as seemed appropriate. All but one of the May maps assessed as part of the project were fair copies, and the pencil grids used in their reduction are still visible as faint lines. Each field is numbered, presumably corresponding to a book of notes.

The results of the work by Alexander May include a series of about thirty estate maps of the highest quality, which depict and name individual areas of pasture, arable and individual buildings. Though long attributed to father Peter, who was a noted surveyor from the mid-eighteenth century, it seems likely that Alexander undertook the majority of the survey despite other pressures on his time, partly with assistance from Robert Johnson (Adams 1979: 232; 237). Peter May was probably about 60 years old by this time, and there is evidence that he directed others in their surveys as his responsibilities grew. On taking up the role as factor to the Earl of Findlater in 1767, he intended to 'give up entirely the business of surveying land' (Adams 1979: 86). Confirming Alexander's role, the Earl of Bute noted in 1784 that:

I am ignorant whether Lady Mount Stuart ever mentioned the receipt of the tin roller enclosing a plan of Mount Stuart; if she did not I must do it, and express at the same time a strong commendation of the neat manner in which it was executed; but I am well acquainted with Mr Alexander May's various talents in that way.

(Adams 1979: 242)

At the same time, the estate funded an 'inventory and appreciation' of the value of each of the agricultural buildings of the estate which was in some cases kept relatively up to date into the early nineteenth century. The book includes indexed entries for over 160 holdings



in Bute, surveyed in 1782. Each entry provides a small sketch of the main and subsidiary farmsteads, detailing each building, its occupant and its function. The buildings are then described in detail, including information on the dimensions and the material of the walls, and the species and type of thatch. In some cases, it also includes information on doors and windows, where they were of value and not owned by the tenant.

The documentary evidence includes commentaries on the general scope and advance of Improvement, but with the addition of very specific details, particularly for the 1780s. Much research remains to be done, and it is likely the Bute collection at Mount Stuart will yield considerably more detail on both the early Improvements from the 1730s and the rebuilding of Bute's farmsteads in the early nineteenth century. It seems likely that analysis as detailed as that undertaken at Menstrie glen using the Wright of Loss papers (RCAHMS 2008) will be well within our grasp.

### **Archaeological evidence**

The archaeological evidence for the second half of the eighteenth century is both complex and multi-faceted, including individual components, such as farmsteads, mills and kilns, as well as landscape features such as cultivation remains, dykes and plantations. Bute's countryside took its present form during the early nineteenth century in particular, but the crucial forces that shaped it had already been active for about a hundred years. The recognisable suite of compact farmsteads, rectangular fields with stone dykes, hedgerows and plantations often seems ubiquitous, but it is surprising how much survives beneath, and how many early features of Improvement have been retained.

Many of the eighteenth-century farmsteads, some of which were dispersed over quite a large area, were taken down and grubbed out as part of the nineteenth-century rebuilding of the farm steadings. Given that about half of those shown by Roy were abandoned, one would expect there to be many more substantial surviving remains. Those farmsteads that stood in the rich arable land have been completely removed, some no doubt surviving as archaeological sites beneath the current ground surface, whereas those that stood in ground that has been left to pasture generally remain as grass-grown footings. The island's complement of rural mills has also been decimated, with little evidence surviving at Ascog, Scalpsie, Drumachloy and Ettrick. At Greenan, a gable still stands, while the water-powered grain mill at Little Kilmory probably dates to the nineteenth century and has been subsequently altered.

Upstanding ruinous buildings do survive particularly well, for example at Ardnagave and Achavoulaig Butt, but they tend to represent peripheral land holdings rather than the principal farms. There are also a few cases of roofed buildings which may incorporate eighteenth-century elements. At Kerryfearn and Lubas, for example, there are structures that are squat and wide, and align with eighteenth-century map depictions. Other fragmentary remains of the larger farmsteads, such as the kiln barn at Ardmaleish, are particularly important. The barn, excavated by Milligan (1961; 1963) and planned by RCAHMS in 2009, was described in great detail in 1782 (fig 10.2). A building of 'stone and clay' that once stood to 13ft [4m] in height, it is now reduced to only 1m or so. Kiln-barns were once numerous on Bute, but very few survive. Corn drying kilns are more common survivors because they were attached to the smaller and more rural settlements. Good examples survive at Ardnagave, Achavoulaig Butt, and Kilwhinleck, the latter excavated in 1934 (Marshall 1934). Where eighteenth-century

farmsteads survive as field monuments, they tend to comprise the footings of buildings. Well preserved farmsteads are found in the south of the island where the farms of Kelspoke, Branser, Kingavin and Glen Callum were amalgamated into an 800 acre farm before January 1780, when it was 'let at £200 a year for a sheep park' (Adams 1979: 218). Occasionally, as at Glen Callum and Cavin, we note the presence of nineteenth-century shepherd's cottages.

Elsewhere on the island, head-dykes enclose areas of cultivated ground, most notably at the head of Glen More. Sometimes standing to more than 1m in height, these turf-and-stone dykes were often depicted by May, but it is quite possible that some pre-date the eighteenth century, particularly when one notes Blain's reference to the Michaelmas Head Court in 1688 where it was decided that 'all head dykes should be built shoulder high'. The dykes were 'totally disregarded' by the time of his writing around 1800 (Ross 1880: 250). He also noted that 'in many places evidences of cultivation appear where not a furrow has been turned over for more than a century past' (Ross 1880: 258). Although a survey of cultivation remains was out-with the scope of the RCAHMS Bute project, many areas of it have already been recorded through aerial survey since 1977, and the Historic Land-use Assessment project (Geddes & Hale 2010: 36; <http://hla.rcahms.gov.uk/>). The majority of the larger areas survive in the far north and south of the island, higher areas of the interior and areas of the coastal strip below the raised beach. The most substantial remains survive at the south-west tip of the island around Barr Hill.

## Case studies

### Eskechranggan

The farmstead of Eskechranggan lies just to the north-west of the Greenan Loch and it now comprises a nineteenth-century courtyard farm with large twentieth-century sheds. On the estate map of 1759 by Foulis it is depicted as four single-storey buildings and two enclosures clustered within a landscape of arable cultivation with rough pasture to the north (fig 10.3). At that time the whole farm was of 213 acres, of which 60 were arable, but another 40 could be ploughed 'for want of hands' (RHP14107, 47). Just to the north of Eskechranggan march, a smallholding of 20 acres labelled *But-leananteaechtan* is depicted as a rectangular area of 'moory pasture' and 'cold moory arable bank' with a single building and a yard. In the accompanying text it is described as 'well laid out' and 'has been a part of Escragan large farm' (RHP14107, 55), although it appears to be tied to North Largievrechtan in 1759. *But Glenbouie*, a smallholding of 17 acres with two buildings and 'an industrious tenant', was also described as if it was formerly part of Eskechranggan. Foulis recommended the addition of six more butts to the farm for the improvement of the land and the rents. In Bute, the term 'butt' or 'but' is used to refer to both individual fields and smallholdings attached to larger farms. It does not equate to a croft, which implies a specific form of legal tenure.

Great changes took place in the next 22 years and May's plan of 1781 shows a very different layout (fig 10.4). Limited to a smaller area near the loch, the field system of Eskechranggan had been partly improved, for long lines representing stone dykes overlay the globular arrangement of earlier fields. The main farm holding had been reduced in overall size to 119 acres, with nearly two thirds in arable. In order to achieve the increase in arable, some land had been added from neighbouring farms, including a distinct block from the adjacent farm of Barone. Elements from 1759 are recognisable on the later plan: the 'meikle



Fig 10.2 Plan of the kiln barn at Ardmaleish (NS06NE 3) (Crown Copyright RCAHMS GV004950).

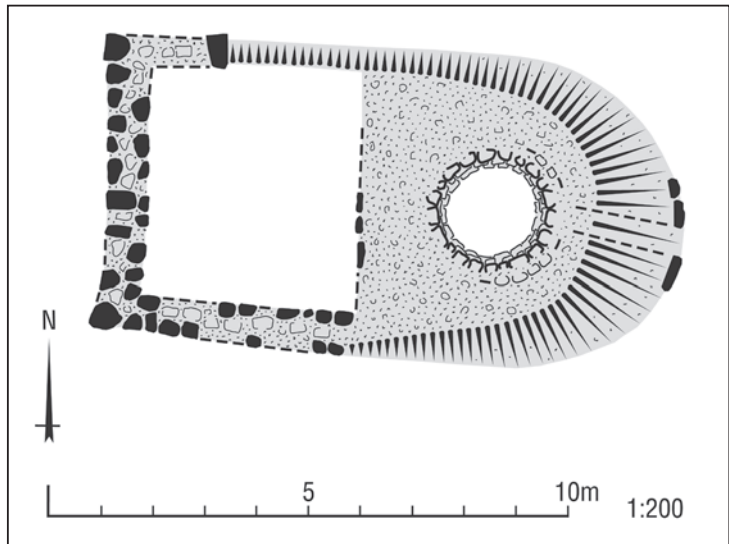


Fig 10.3 Extract of the plan of the farms of Eskchragan, Barrone and Leannymallach by John Foulis, 1759 (© The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive).

enclosure of Eskechranggan' appears to be the arable that was formerly part of Barone and its irregular boundary is partly overlain by a rectangular enclosure.

*Butt Leninteskine* was included in both the May survey and the appreciation, and it seems to have been considered a butt of Eskechranggan again by the 1780s. It had been increased in size to 69 acres, of which 29 were arable, a change that was facilitated by the addition of pasture taken from Eskechranggan, and the addition of at least a few new arable folds, probably to the east and north.

Elsewhere, other elements of the new field system split plots in half. May's plan does distinguish between different types of boundary, but thorough field survey and research is needed to clarify the symbols. Most of the field names are simply descriptive (eg heathery), but some include proper names (e.g. Nicol's/Johnston's fold) that do not appear to relate to the recorded tenants. The folds around Eskechranggan include some that are very large and pre-date the system of stone walls which has been laid out over them. At *Leninteskine*, the folds are a little smaller, and this is generally true of the butts which were on less favourable land with less available labour. There is no clear sign of a head-dyke at Eskechranggan, but some folds may have been formally enclosed by turf dykes, while other areas of cultivation depicted as folds may have had no visible upstanding boundary, instead simply marked by change in land use. There are also areas noted as 'has once been in tillage' and a plot of rig labelled 'wet land overgrown with rushes'.

In 1782 the farm was 'possessed' by the aforementioned John Blain and occupied by his subtenants. The four individual buildings function as ranges, the first comprising a byre and house (occupied by tenant John Mcfie). The second housed a stable, barn, sheep house and cottar house (occupied by James Duncan). The third was another byre and house (occupied by sub-tenant Robert Spence), while the fourth contained a milk house and a calves house. The gabled buildings were generally constructed in 'stone and clay', occasionally with the addition of turf to the upper part of the walls. Roofing couples were of oak, ash and alder with cabers and ribs (ie rafters and purlins) in similar species. The barn was a more substantial affair with hewn lintels and rebates, fir couples 'standing on the wall head', split oak cabers, and four doors with a given value. The whole farmstead at Eskechranggan was valued at £27, the butt of *Leninteskine* worth an additional £10. The same document records the 'amelioration' (improvement) of the houses by the tenant John MacPherson in 1832, over fifty years later. This is almost certainly the stage at which the old buildings of Eskechranggan were taken down and replaced by a U-plan courtyard steading, on the same site.

*Leninteskine* farmstead seems to have been completely abandoned by the 1860s, when it is depicted on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map in ruins (Buteshire 1869, Sheet CCIV), but further division did take place before the end of the nineteenth century (1897, Sheet CCIV.NW). The western fields of this butt were by that stage completed cleared, cultivated and bounded by stone walls, while those to the east, added in the late eighteenth century, are shown by the Ordnance Survey as cleared but are not enclosed and have probably been abandoned. This large eastern area is still notably green, with the remains of rig-and-furrow aligned east-to-west, as shown in 1781. The ruins of *Butt Leninteskine* survive today within an improved pasture field, and the footings of two buildings correspond in both orientation and length to those recorded in the 1782 inventory. Although supplemented by field clearance, there is some evidence that the buildings were not simply left to collapse and that some material was removed: the interiors are choked with a relatively small amount of

rubble and it seems likely that the walls were robbed of stone, and the roofing timbers and thatch were removed to be re-used or spread as fertiliser, respectively.

Very little is now visible of Butt Glenbuie. Mature trees grow on fragments of bank that probably once enclosed the yard, a short section of track way survives, and two modern fields mirror the size and shape of the eighteenth-century holding.

### Achavoulaig

The modern farmstead of Achavoulaig comprises a compact courtyard of buildings with the addition of some large modern sheds to the north-east. Two settlements are shown on Roy's military map at the west side of Glenmore Burn, between Drumachloy to the south and Loch Tarff (now known as the Bull Loch) to the north. These are Achavoulaig and the subsidiary Achavoulaig Butt, and it seems likely that Roy's surveyors noted them from the east side of the glen without finding out their proper names. Little if any cultivation is shown by the butt whilst a long swathe of it is shown around the main farm, and there is a definite distinction in Roy's symbols which reflects their relative status.

Foulis surveyed the farm of *Achavoulick* with High and Laigh Glenmore in 1758–9, stating the area at 384 acres of which 50 were ploughed (fig 10.5). His plan shows the principal farmstead of six buildings, surrounded by 'arable folds' and a 'shrubby' birch wood to the north-west. Far up the glen, two isolated buildings and a smaller area of folds are depicted. In the accompanying text, Foulis described how it is 'very pleasant along the burn, where



Fig 10.4 The May plan of the farms of Eskechruggan and Leninteskine, dated 1781 (© The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive).



half a score of those cottages called butts might be fixed, to the great improvement of the land and rents' (RHP14107, 64).

The boundaries and arrangement of land was similar when the farm was resurveyed by May twenty years later (fig 10.6). Around 1780 the farm was of 333 acres, of which only 41 acres were in arable, similar proportions to 1759. Over thirty individual plots of cultivation are depicted, of which the largest is about three acres. They are generally given English descriptive names, such as 'Meadow Rig'; 'Croft at the back of the yard'; 'Swine's butt', but some Gaelic derived names are less easily understood such as *Clanverpal*, and *Culnadallach* (perhaps 'back of the oak wood'). Each field had a distinct boundary marked by a thick line, but many have a second thick line above, probably indicating various phases of head dyke. Indeed, an analysis of both vertical aerial photographs and the contemporary and adjacent estate maps of Drumachloy and Kildavanan suggests that the marches of the farms had already been changed by 1780: the head-dyke continues south onto Drumachloy land, enclosing a large area of arable with Achavoulaig farmstead near the centre. The high and low 'clanverpal' arable folds shown on May's map are still extant just to the west of the farmstead remains, and a thorough survey of the area would perhaps tease out the detailed history.

In 1782 the main tenant Robert Maconachie stayed in a house and byre 'under one

roof', and the choice of phrase may suggest that it was usual by that date for the house and byre to be separated by a mid-gable. Built of stone and mortar, with the upper part of the walls in turf, the building was roofed with seven ash couples and a heather thatch. A small cottar's house was attached to the end of this building, while another cottar occupied a large building (60ft long), but in 'very bad repair', and valued at just over £1.



Fig 10.5 A plan of the farms of Achavoulick, High Glenmore and Laigh Glenmore by John Foulis 1759 (© The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive).

A sub-tenant, Robert Macalpin, stayed in Achavoulaig Butt, which lay much further up the glen. The stone-and-clay house and byre, over 40ft in length, was in ‘very bad repair’ in 1782, the four couples (3 of plane and 1 of alder) were supported on 8 remedial forks. A small barn with a heather thatch was in little better condition, whilst some ‘old timber in a sheep house’ was valued rather than the sheep house itself. The whole of the butt was only worth £1.17.4. Mention is made in 1784 and 1785 of timbers for the kiln, probably at the butt of Achavoulaig, though there may have been one at the main farm. In 1808, the ledger notes the ‘amelioration’ of the main farmstead, and the arrears of the outgoing tenant.

Little survives of Achavoulaig farmstead except the grass-grown footings of two buildings that can be found on either side of a small burn, in the positions shown on the farm plan, and up to 0.7m in height. The largest has a well-defined east end but is less well preserved at the west. This is likely to be the main 85ft long range, containing a house, byre and cottar house. A smaller building 7m to the south is probably that shown on May's plan, but not valued, while a third, another 13m to the south, may be the ephemeral remains of the barn and stable. The remainder of the farmstead has been removed for use elsewhere. In contrast, Achavoulaig Butt is one of the better preserved groups of eighteenth-century buildings in Bute and they still stand to gable height (fig 10.7). Sections of the bank of the adjacent burn have been revetted, presumably to protect the farmstead from spate, and there is a fragment of what may have been an earlier third building. A large farmyard bank extends from the barn to the south, returning along the stream edge, and another, later, bank hints at earlier phases. A kiln is situated over 60m to the north-west, and the remains of cultivation survive close to the west as well as further up hill.



Fig 10.6 May's plan of the farms of Achawillig, Upper Glenmore and Nether Glenmore (© The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive).

High on the hill above, a very substantial turf and stone dyke encloses the arable of the butt, the overall size of which has been reduced at some point. Within this area, plots of cultivation are still visible, some still obvious as greener areas of furrows, but others now very damp and overgrown with vegetation. The dykes running north to south (as shown on the plan that divided this wider area into three parts) are less obvious on the ground and have been much less substantial features. There is no obvious evidence on the ground to reflect the position of the meadow, which lay immediately south of the modern forestry boundary.

## Kilmichael

The farm of Kilmichael is one of the largest in Bute and is graced with both a beautiful aspect and a relatively grand suite of nineteenth-century buildings, including a farmstead that was listed in 1998. Roy's map shows four settlements, three of which were named as Barlia, *Kirrytriach* (Cretriach) and Kilmichael. The fourth, Ardnagave, is named but not depicted, perhaps because it lay high on the hill and relatively far to the east. The estate plans of Kilmichael are a little less detailed than some others as the surveyors wanted to depict the farms on sheets of a consistent size, although it is possible that the surveys were undertaken at the same scale, but a greater reduction was used for the final copies. The plan by John Foulis also shows four farmsteads and it is possible to accurately locate these thanks to their depiction in relation to features such as streams and meadows, as well as to each other (fig 10.8). They are Kilmichael itself (of five buildings) and the smallholdings of Barlia, Cretriach and Ardnagave (two buildings each).

In 1759, the whole farm covered 858 acres, of which 100 were arable, and the majority of the remainder was described as 'moory' hills and mosses, although there were areas of woodland and a meadow on the Aultmore Burn below Ardnagave. Foulis recommended that the coastal fringe from Ettrick Bay to Kilmichael be set out as smallholdings, while the hinterland should be devoted to breeding 'small black cattle and sheep'.

For if the most were made of the spots of arable land...which in this part of Scotland is to be done in small possessions, it is needless to occupy a number of hands upon an un-improveable subject that can be done to as good purpose by one or two hands, while so much subject worthy of attention lyes uncultivated for want of hand.

(RHP14107, 67)

The estate plan of Kilmichael produced by May has a slightly different colouring to that on the dated sheets, and it may date to slightly later in the eighteenth century (fig 10.9). Despite the larger size of the farm, the plan was produced with the same care giving the acreage of Kilmichael as 933 Scots acres, of which 57 were arable and 23 acres 'natural wood'. The plan shows settlements at the Ferry (two buildings), Kilmichael (five buildings), Aultmore (two buildings), and Cretriach and Ardnagave (three buildings each). Very unusually for May, two of the three buildings at Ardnagave are depicted despite being apparently in ruins. Although May does show areas that were formerly cultivated, the Ardnagave folds are shown with boundaries, rigs and names, as if they were still in use at this time. The 'North Park' of Kilmichael appears to have been enclosed by a stone dyke at this time, as does the arable ground at the main farmstead, and earlier field dykes are shown in the pasture ground



on the slopes above the farmstead. Much of the pasture is annotated very specifically, such as 'midling good rough pasture for young cattle'. Two tracks are shown, both leading over to the meadow and presumably to peat grounds further into the hills. Both are still in use.

The farmstead of Kilmichael, 'possessed by Joseph Shankland', included five ranges with mixed uses: a dwelling house; a byre and calves house; a stable and two cottar houses; two barns and a chaff house; and a kiln barn. The dwelling house was more substantial than

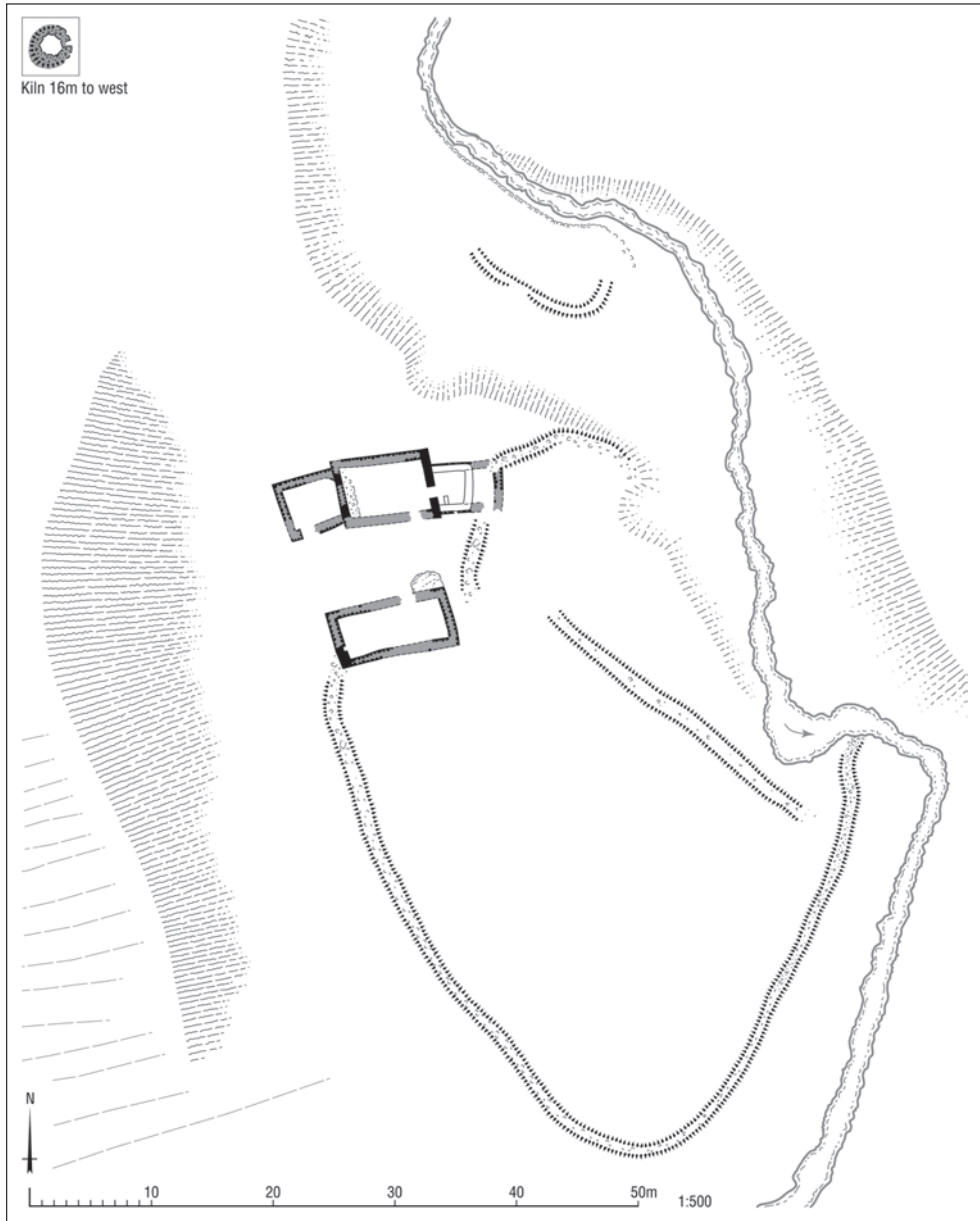


Fig 10.7 Plan of Achavoulaig Butt (Crown Copyright RCAHMS GV004953)



Fig 10.8 Extract from the John Foulis map of Kilmichael showing the area around the settlements (© The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive).

elsewhere, built of stone and clay with ‘two outer gables and one inner gable built to the top’. Unusually, the house had three windows, with the upper half glass and the lower half timber, as well as timber doors that were individually valued. Roofed with twelve oak couples ‘standing on the wall’ (as opposed to crucks that rested on the floor), the building had a heather thatch that was a ‘good deal wore but watertight’. If Smith’s comments are anything to go by, a heather thatch might last up to 100 years (Smith 1798: 19). Other buildings in the group were built entirely of stone and clay, and had couples of other species (including ash and fir), and thatch of straw, heather, fern or a combination thereof. The valuation included a manger, forks to support weak couples, doors and their furniture and stakes for binding animals. Interestingly the valuation did not include a door ‘owned by the tenant’. The most valuable buildings were the main house and the barn, valued at £11 each, and the whole farmstead was put at £34 15s 6d.

The smaller butts included the ‘ferry butt lying northward of Joseph Shankland’s farm’, comprising only one building that was valued at £2 5s 4d. Butt Cretriach included a five-bay house with ash couples ‘wore about the knees’ and a fern thatch, and a barn, together valued at £4 4s 11d. Another ferry butt, to the south-west of Kilmichael farmstead, included a byre-house tenanted by a ‘Widow Black’, and a brew house which had walls ‘built by the tenant’.

The farmstead at Ardnagave must have been abandoned at this time, and does not feature in the entry for Kilmichael or under its own name, despite featuring on a later larger scale estate map by Mackinlay in 1823.

Turning to archaeological evidence on Kilmichael farm, a rich suite of buildings survive, particularly at the northern end of the farm. They include both farmsteads set in areas of arable, and small huts that are probably related to the limited practice of shieling. Some of this may relate to cultivation in the medieval period, and some of the buildings must surely be earlier than eighteenth century in date. Substantial eighteenth-century remains survive at three of the five locations noted on May's map.

Lying just outside the nineteenth-century head-dyke, the eighteenth-century settlement of Barlia has been reduced to grass-grown footings of at least two buildings. The fields to the north were abandoned by c1780, but large areas of rig are still visible, some of which are enclosed by turf dykes. At Cretriach, there are the remains of three buildings. A knocking stone that would have been used for mashing and removing husks stands nearby. Two of the buildings were probably constructed after 1780 but all three were abandoned before the Ordnance Survey of 1864 (Argyllshire 1869, Sheet CCXIII). Two buildings are arranged in parallel, and both have been shortened.

Further down the hill, on the south side of the Aultmore burn, very little is left of the farmstead known as Aultmore or Ferry butt. The ruins of the ferry house and quay stand further to the west, but the outline of the three associated arable plots is recognisable in the current shape of the fields and the location of the mature trees.

The settlement at Ardnagave lies at an altitude of about 130m above sea level in a small hanging valley over 900m ENE of Kilmichael (fig 10.9). There are the remains of extensive rigged cultivation below a well preserved head-dyke which runs from the former meadow ground to the Aultmore Burn on the east. The largest building measures 13m by 5.7m over walls 0.6m in thickness and up to 2.4m in height. It has at least one entrance, in the east wall, and there may be a byre-drain within its lower (south) end (fig 10.10). A second, less well preserved building stands 10m to the north, in the south-east corner of a small, roughly triangular enclosure. It measures 12.8m by 4.5m transversely over stone walls 0.7m in thickness. A bedneuk projects from the west side of the building, presumably to house a box bed set into the wall, and there is an entrance in the east wall. This is the only known bedneuk in Bute, and there do not appear to be any others in Argyll (see RCAHMS 1971–1992). Similar examples have been found during survey at farmsteads including Nether Benzieclett, Orkney (Fenton 1978), Strath Rusdale (eg Dalmore, Dalreoich) and Upper Strathnairn, Highland (RCAHMS 1994: 6–7), and Camserney, Perth, and it is clearly a widely distributed, if unusual, feature in eighteenth-century buildings.

An outshot at the north end of this same building seems to overlie an earlier building. The third building is situated 50m south-west of the first and is more ruinous still, measuring 8m by 5m over walls reduced to a rubble spread. The northern end of the building has been let into the natural slope and a large accumulation of stone at the south end may indicate the presence of a kiln. The fourth building lies 50m west of the largest, on the south-west side of a small enclosure. Rectangular in plan, it measures 10m by 5.5m over walls reduced to grass-grown footings. The corn-drying kiln is situated immediately east-north-east of the third building. It measures about 5m in diameter by 1m in height overall and the bowl (about 2m in diameter) is partly filled with debris.

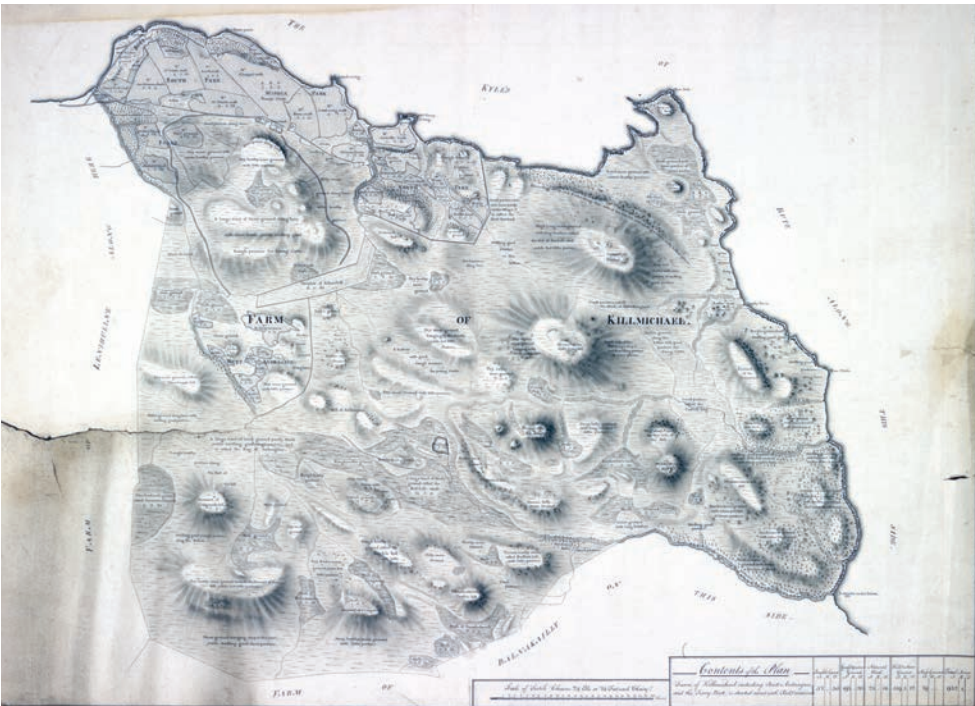


Fig 10.9 Extract of May’s plan of Kilmichael c1784 (© The Bute Collection, Mountstuart Archive).

Nothing is now visible of the buildings of the eighteenth-century farmstead of Kilmichael, although it is possible that there are sub-surface remains of some structures, particularly in those areas that do not underlie the more substantial nineteenth-century buildings. To the south-west, at the site of another ferry port, the site of the eighteenth-century butt is now in a thick copse but the standing remains date to the nineteenth century, rather than 1769, when this new ferry terminal was created (Maclagan 1997: 18–21).

Eighteenth-century cultivation remains have generally survived best in the areas of the farmstead higher than the 40m contour, and they include large swathes of improved and formerly cultivated ground near Glenvoidean chambered cairn.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Much of the material presented above can seem to be a relatively straightforward representation of physical and documentary evidence. It is particularly useful as a measure of the accuracy of different eighteenth-century map sources, a guide to the vernacular architecture of Bute during the later eighteenth century, and as part of the wider story of change in eighteenth-century Scotland which affected rural society in particular. But history can be read in a number of different ways and it is important to recognise that the story of landscape change did not begin in 1750. Such a thorough survey as May’s depicts many patterns of rig, enclosure and building that reflect longer term changes, and we should be careful to recognise the fragments of medieval as well as twentieth-century landscapes in the overall pattern, as noted by Angus Hannah in this volume.



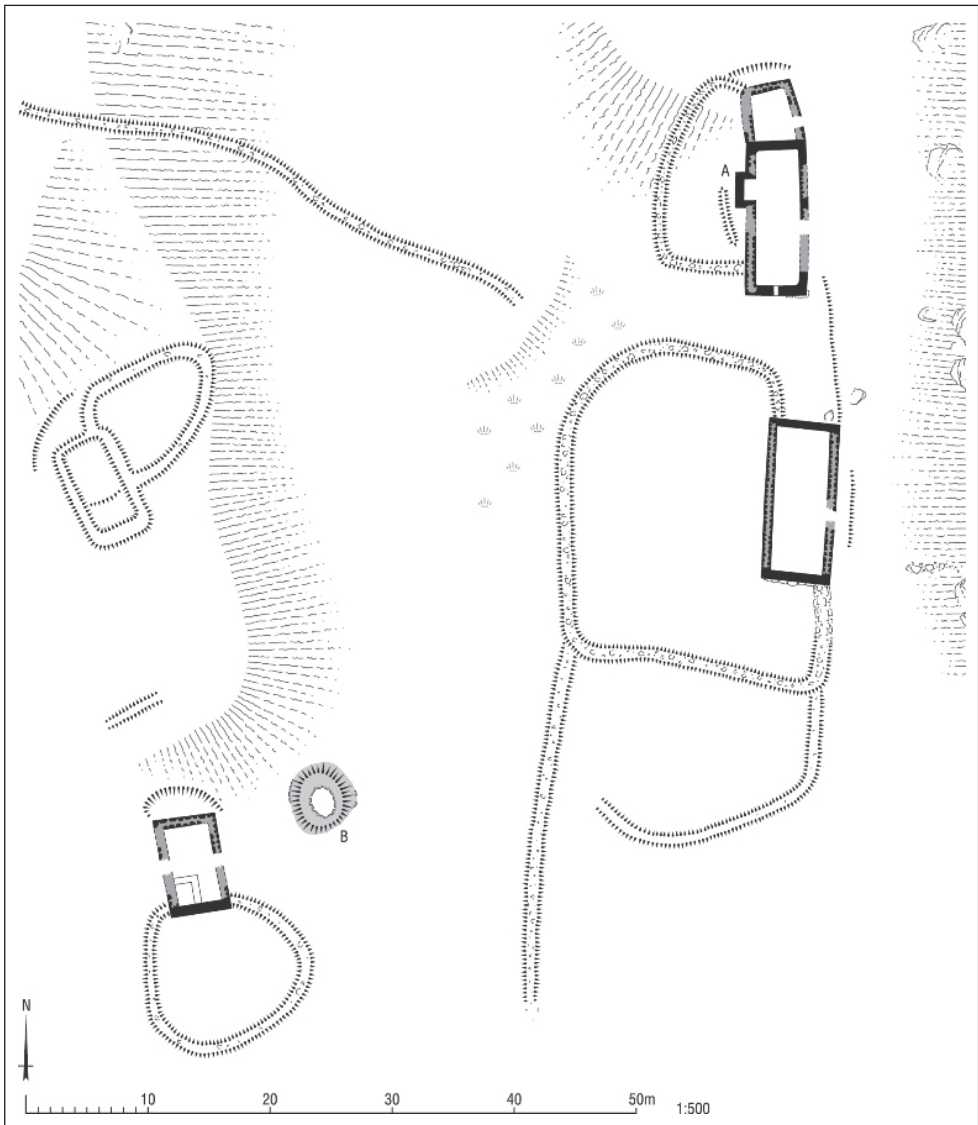


Fig 10.10 Plan of the two byre-houses, corn drying kiln and barn at Ardnagave (Crown Copyright, RCAHMS GV004728).

Improvement was not an inevitable and consistent event across Bute: there were dynamic processes that affected the rate and character of change. The farmsteads of south Bute were turned over to sheep before 1780, while some smallholdings in the north survived well into the twentieth century. Notably, Foulis consistently recommended that the number of smallholdings was increased on some farms. The story of the three case studies demonstrates how varied the situation was in each farm in the 1750s and how different the alterations made over the next 30 years were. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must appreciate

that this is a story about communities of people, some of whom benefited from Improvement and some of whom did not. It is an explicitly political story, but one in which people were individual agents (see Carter 1979; Dalglish 2010). Different families must have reacted differently to the pressures and opportunities that they experienced when land holdings changed, and a more holistic approach is recommended for future work, where archaeological and documentary approaches are subsumed within a socio-economic analysis.

Bute presents us with a fantastic opportunity to tie together both a comprehensive archaeological survey of the island's rural settlement over the last twenty years, and a very important collection of documents held in the Bute Collection at Mount Stuart. By combining these two sources, it is possible to present a remarkably clear picture of the changes that took place in the later part of the eighteenth century. We can see that the powers of the estate were far reaching and comprehensive efforts were made to change the landscape with productivity in mind. When viewed from 200 years later, these appear consistent, measured and thorough but a more detailed examination has shown us that they were piecemeal and complex, and that it is more productive to look through the prism of individual landholdings when one has the opportunity.

The rich documentary evidence allows one to begin to look at the people involved and to gain an understanding of the personal stories of owner, factor, tenant, sub-tenant and cottar, while the archaeological monuments inspire a deep and constant sense of place. The story of the eighteenth-century farms of the island is one of continuous change and effort, and it cannot be seen as static or as an inevitable result of overwhelming historical processes.

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This essay was developed from a presentation given at the Scottish Society for Northern Studies conference in Rothesay in April 2010. Much of the fieldwork and research was funded through the DBLPS and RCAHMS Bute project, and my gratitude extends to both Bridget Patterson and Paul Duffy of the DBLPS. Particular thanks go to Andrew Maclean at Mount Stuart for access to the material held in the Bute collection at Mount Stuart, while the estate and tenants were gracious in allowing unhindered access to their land. The survey of Achavoulaig Butt was undertaken as an RCAHMS training exercise with local residents Isabell McArthur, Charles Murray and Donald Kinnear, whose humour and attention to detail was greatly appreciated. An earlier draft of this paper was also commented on by Angus Hannah and Paul Duffy.

The remaining surveys were undertaken by the author, Ian Parker, James Hepher, John Sherriff and Alan Leith of RCAHMS. The publication illustrations were created by Georgina Brown and Ian Parker. Editing duties at RCAHMS were adopted by John Sherriff and Robin Turner, with additional comments from Piers Dixon. The archive material at Mount Stuart was photographed by Stephen Wallace and Derek Smart.

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4. Estate map of North Bute by Joannes Mackinlay, 1823

Items 1, 2 and part of item 3 were photographed by RCAHMS as part of the DBLPS project. A copy of item 2 is also available at the National Archives of Scotland (RHP14107).

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